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SWEDISH OPINION OF THE FINNISH PROBLEM

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SPECIAL MEMORANDUM

IN COLLABORATION WITH

EASTERN EUROPEAN SECTION

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By Odell K. Berry Jr. Date 1/26/72

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SWEDISH OPINION OF THE FINNISH PROBLEM

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SWEDISH OPINION OF THE FINNISH PROBLEM

In the new Russo-Finnish War, Sweden has again given much aid to Finland. But this time, contrary to the singleness of purpose which marked her assistance in the first war, the aid is extended with certain reservations.

Between The Two Wars

To understand these reservations it is necessary to recall some of the epochal developments between the two wars, as they reacted upon Swedish public opinion. The occupation and conquest of Denmark and Norway, the invasion of the Low Countries, and the fall of France, engendered in various Swedish quarters an uncritical admiration of totalitarian warfare, and a sense of defeatism.

But this mood underwent some change in the spring of 1941[1]. The full import of London's heroic stand in the autumn of 1940 had become clear, British victories had been registered in Libya, and the Greeks had heroi-

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[1] Memorandum, March 3, 1941.

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cally stood out against Mussolini. Most important of all perhaps to the Swedes, their neighbors the Norwegians were developing an increasingly tenacious resistance to Nazi oppression.

These developments had some effect upon Swedish devotion to the policy of solidarity with Finland. One could see it, for instance, in a limited exchange of press opinion in the spring of 1941. In April, reports circulated in Sweden that German infiltration into Finland was unmistakable, and that the Finns were generally playing up to the Germans. Some Swedish organs were bold enough--in the setting of the time their action had in it an element of boldness--to suggest that these "lapses" on Finland's part might be greater than were permissible under the rules of neutrality[2]. The most ardent advocate of collaboration with Finland, Svenska Dagbladet, observed that success for the policy of cooperation between the two countries would depend on the observance of unconditional neutrality, and on a foreign policy conducted along purely Nordic lines. But the Helsingin Sanomat,

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[2]Memorandum, April 28, 1941.

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largest paper in Finland, thought this opinion a reflection on Finland, and complained that since the close of the Russo-Finnish War, Sweden had been none too accommodating. The pro-Nazi Aftonbladet in Stockholm criticized everybody for having been so indiscreet as to discuss the matter at all. It should be noted that the Swedish organs involved were not out to challenge Swedish-Finnish solidarity, but anxious to point out factors which they feared endangered that solidarity.

The Second War

A few weeks later Finland was again at War with Russia, and much of the latent sympathy for Finland revived in Sweden. But things were not the same as in the winter of 1939-40. This time Germany was allied with Finland, a circumstance which stirred in Swedish circles some of the traditional admiration for German culture (against this was balanced the increased dislike of Hitler). Stockholms Tidningen, one of Torsten Kreuger's two Nazi-friendly media, somewhat piquantly remarked that recent events had justified Finland. Unsuccessfully she had sought reinsurance through an alliance with Sweden,

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and failing that, had been obliged to turn elsewhere (i.e., to Germany). However, it was perhaps significant that even this medium took a somewhat independent attitude toward the renewed war[3]. Svenska Dagbladet, always in favor of closer ties with Finland, regretted that Sweden had avoided any alliance with Finland in the pre-war decades, but concluded that in the present hostilities Sweden could not have acted otherwise than it had done.

The Swedish press generally hoped that Finland would regain its former boundaries and establish the conditions necessary to its continued existence as a free state. Official policy too, looked to a continuance of Swedish-Finnish solidarity. A statement by the Foreign Office made clear that after the close of the first Russo-Finnish War, Sweden had been willing to consider an alliance with Finland, and early in 1941 had clearly notified Russia that the preservation of Finnish independence was of the highest order of importance to Sweden[4].

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[3]Memorandum, July 8, 1941.

[4]Memorandum, July 19, 1941.

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Apprehension Over Anglo-Saxon Policies

A note of wariness has characterized Swedish press opinion as the western powers have lately sought to influence Finland in their favor. England and more remotely the United States lost some prestige, for the time being at any rate, by undertaking to collaborate with Russia. The Atlantic Charter raised concrete questions. Especially the provincial press in Sweden wondered whether the Anglo-Saxon powers would have the strength after the war to apply the principles of the contemplated treaty. What would happen to the Baltic states; in particular, what would happen to Finland[5]?

When Finland in November rather pointedly replied to Anglo-Saxon diplomatic efforts to force her withdrawal from hostilities, this reply was generally approved in Sweden[6]. Finland, it was felt, had given evidence that she sought only to establish her own security; and so long as that aim was not exceeded, Sweden would solidly support Finland. The labor unions justified aid to Finland as a contribution to the general defense of

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[5]Telegram, August 18, 1941.

[6]Memorandum, November 24, 1941.

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democracy[7]. Social democrats interpreted the pressure on Finland as a gesture intended to make manifest the Anglo-Saxon solidarity with the Soviet Union[8]. One provincial medium thought the United States might well use other means than pressure on Finland, to establish justice in the world[9], and Secretary Hull's statement of November 8 was designated more worthy of the first Roosevelt's blustering diplomacy, than of the good-neighbor policy of today's President[10].

Throughout the Swedish press there was a note of apprehension lest Anglo-Saxon pressure force Finland into the conflict of the Great Powers, a conflict which she had no desire to enter[11]. These apprehensions seemed well founded, when a few weeks later, Finland joined the signatories of the Anti-Comintern Pact. The Swedish press sought to place the best possible construction on this action. It was, said some, by no means as bad as

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[7]Dagens Nyheter, Nov. 17, 1941.
[8]Social Demokraten, quoted in Aftonbladet, Nov,13,1941,p.4.
[9]Ibid., Nov. 14, 1941, p. 4.
[10]Telegram, Nov. 13, 1941.
[11]Telegram, Nov. 7, 1941.

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might have been an adherence to the Tripartite Pact, or an outright alignment with Germany. The Anglo-Saxon powers should therefore take care not to push Finland further into the German camp[12]. Swedish opinion was irritated because Finland had been classed with Hungary and Roumania, for unlike these, Finland had always insisted that the war with Russia was a separate war. Only the strongly pro-Ally Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning read Finland out of the community of Scandinavian democracies[13].

Apprehension Over Finnish Expansionism

Solidarity with Finland is the generally accepted policy in Sweden, so long as Finland's aim is the recovery of former territory and the consolidation of national security. But when Finnish extremists begin to boast of taking Eastern Karelia, Swedish opinion becomes uneasy[14]. Even Svenska Dagbladet, which is most interested in solidarity with Finland, has intimated that Finland made a mistake in trying to expand its boundaries into Karelia[15].

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[12]Telegram, Nov.26, 1941; Dec.7, 1941; Memorandum, Nov.24, 1941.
[13]Telegram, Dec. 7 and 11, 1941.
[14]Ibid., October 8, 1941; Dec. 22, 1941.
[15]Ibid., Jan. 3, 1942.

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Of late, Swedish opinion has expressed hope for an early stabilization of the Russo-Finnish front. There is apprehension lest Finland wait too long (and lose too much) before coming to terms with the enemy. Dagens Nyheter in a mildly excusing tone has pointed out that the grandiose plans ascribed to the Finns are really of German origin, and are therefore "foreign" to an overwhelming body of opinion in Finland[16]. There has been increasing discussion of probable Swedish policy in the event of a British descent on Norway or of the effects of a sudden Russian victory over Finland, as if the discussion were meant to urge the Finns to hasten and adopt a policy of peace. Some Swedes are clearly apprehensive lest a Russian success in Finland revive in Sweden in striking fashion the strong anti-Russian sentiments of 1939-40.

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[16]Cf. The New York Times, Jan. 4, 1942.

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CONCLUSION:

There is a tangible difference in the way Swedish opinion has expressed itself in the two Russo-Finnish Wars. The traditional fear of Russia remains but in the second war more than in the first this fear is balanced by the new dislike of Hitler. The Swedes, could they have their way, would prefer defeat and exhaustion for Germany and Russia, and victory for Finland, Britain and the United States.

Support of the Finnish cause is still vital to Sweden, but in 1941-2 that support is decidedly more temperate than it was in 1939-40[17]. However, behind that continued support lingers an assumption, so stoutly maintained by the Finns, that we have to do with two wars, one local, the other general. From this there follows a corollary: a small state (i.e., Finland) can engage in the local war without taking part in the larger one.

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[17] This seems clearly reflected in Swedish enlistments for the Finnish war. According to one (not too definitive) source, nearly 8000 Swedes enlisted for service in Finland in the earlier war, while the corresponding figure in the second war was less than 1100.

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How fallacious is this premise of a local war that has no connection with the general struggle, is clear enough from a vantage point several thousand miles from the Baltic, but it is not so evident to many Finns and Swedes.

Swedish writers constantly return to the claim that Finland has no desire to take part in the general war. Hence they argue, Finland must not be deserted by the democracies. Sweden has no intention of bringing about any such desertion, and her support of the eastern neighbor might take on intemperate proportions if a victorious Russia should advance any distance into Finland proper. This is a possibility of which American policy must take account, in any effort to strengthen the democratic front in Northern Europe.